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Strengthening social capital in Indonesia using digital technology



“After the disaster [earthquake], the area where I live did not have a clean water supply, we didn’t know where to look for clean water, and the power was out. After reading a post on AtmaGo that said that the Red Cross had a water supply, the whole family and I went to the Red Cross office, and Alhamdulillah, the Red Cross provided water to our housing complex.”

-Imelda, student, Sulawesi

Source: AtmaConnect

Social capital strengthens the ability of people to weather difficult times and communities to manage shocks and stresses. Social capital is accessed through strong networks. However, dramatic changes in demographics and mobility has meant that many people no longer live within traditional social networks, and their neighbors may be too many in number to allow in-person relationships with all.

AtmaGo builds social capital digitally. A social networking app focused on community engagement and resilience, AtmaGo enables hyperlocal information sharing. Initially focused on connecting users around disaster preparedness and recovery, it has grown into a tool for broader community engagement and resilience. Users read, write, and comment in areas including:

- Disaster alerts: Real-time information about local hazards and large-scale disasters, including local conditions, advice on where to go for safety, and how to access help and resources
- Community information: Discussions of community opportunities and challenges, tracking of government actions, and announcements of community improvement events
- Economic activity: Job postings and an e-commerce platform for local businesses in support of a vibrant local economy

Much of the platform’s content is created by citizen journalists, who are trained to write accurate and compelling posts. The platform is moderated to prevent hoaxes and hate speech. Designed to operate with low bandwidth on feature phones and smartphones, AtmaGo has reached over 6 million users in Indonesia. Women comprise 55% of users; 45% of users are 18-24 years of age.

Under the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, American Red Cross partnered with AtmaGo in 2019 to improve earthquake preparedness. Community disaster preparedness workers and volunteers were trained as citizen journalists to create relevant posts on AtmaGo. In six months, the platform gained 75,000 new users in the target areas, and community knowledge and action to better prepare for earthquakes increased.

A 2018 evaluation found that, at a scale of 1 million users, actions taken by AtmaGo users based on early warnings led to \$106 million in avoided economic losses and over 6,000 years of health life saved per year.

Adaptable to new hazards, AtmaGo has integrated new resources around the Covid-19 pandemic, in partnership with USAID’s MADANI project. A micro-site on AtmaGo includes official information about Covid-19 cases, infographics around prevention, and user-generated stories. Among survey respondents, 85% said they will change their behavior (e.g., social distancing) as a result of information on the platform. Communities have used AtmaGo to organize mask making and distribution. The platform also offers a valuable resource to governments and development organizations to crowdsource information; a survey of Covid-19 impacts through AtmaGo generated over 700 user responses within a few days.

AtmaGo was a winner of the Global Resilience Partnership’s 2019 Innovation Challenge.



AtmaGo strengthens users’ resilience to shocks across domains